the direction of peace, friendship and cooperation, and should not be wasted in propaganda or scoring debating points. The Agra Summit was to have been a retreat, so as to enable the leaders of both the countries to meet, in privacy and confidentiality, and address complex and intricate issues pertaining to India–Pakistan relations. Government shall continue in their endeavour to build good neighbourly ties with Pakistan, through quiet and serious diplomacy.

There have been several informed assessments of the negative impact of the telecast, of what was initially projected as an off-the- record breakfast meeting of President Pervez Musharraf with senior Indian editors, on the conduct and the outcome of the Summit.

Meeting of Foreign Secretaries of SAARC

4179. SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the meeting of the Foreign Secretaries of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation scheduled to be held on the 8th June, 2001 was postponed;

(b) whether any fresh date for the meeting has been fixed; and

(c) if so, the details thereof ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) The meeting took place on August 9-10, 2001 in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Meeting of Bay of Bengal group of countries

4180. SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that a meeting of the Bay of Bengal group of countries on transport and communication was held in New Delhi in the month of April, 2001;

(b) if so, the names of the countries that participated in the meeting; and

(c) the outcome of the meeting ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH) : (a) and (b) The First Meeting of the Experts Group of Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand—Economic Cooperation [BIMST-EC] on Transport and Communications was held on April 23-24, 2001 in New Delhi. Experts from the five member countries of BIMST-EC participated in the meeting.

(c) At the meeting it was decided that the BIMST-EC countries should cooperate in the following areas : transport and cross border facilitation; multimodal transport and logistics; maritime transport including inland water transport; infrastructure development; communication linkages and networking; human resource development in the field of transport and communication.

"Indo-Russian Friendship"

4181. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news-item, entitled "Indo-Russian friendship disappearing : Report" that appeared in the News Time dated the 2nd August, 2001;

(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto; and

(c) the steps proposed to be taken to address the problems adversely affecting our traditional friendship with Russia?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Contrary to some views expressed in the news-item, Indo-Russian relations are time-tested, and based on continuity, trust and mutual understanding. The importance attached to these relations is not subject to political vicissitudes. There is a national consensus in both the countries on the need for a strong and stable relationship between India and the Russian Federation. The Declaration on Strategic Partnership between India and the Russian Federation signed in October, 2000 during the visit of President Putin to India has raised the relations between the two countries to a qualitatively higher level.

(c) Cooperation between India and the Russian Federation is multi-faceted and all encompassing. The Prime Minister of India is expected to pay an official